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TAGS: PREL PBTS PHUM MO AG WI  
SUBJECT: POLISARIO AMBASSADOR HOSTILE TO AUTONOMY  
DISCUSSIONS

REF: A. 06 STATE 662755  
    1B. 06 ALGIERS 1450  
    1C. 06 ALGIERS 2025

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4 b, d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Polisario Ambassador Beissat told us January 14 that the Polisario had perceived a marked recent shift in U.S. policy on the Western Sahara. The Polisario now viewed the U.S. as doing France's bidding and supporting the Moroccan position. Beissat insisted that any discussions with Morocco on the Western Sahara needed to take up where the Baker Plan left off: the holding of a referendum. DCM noted that Morocco ultimately rejected the Baker Plan and encouraged the Polisario to talk directly with Morocco about its expected autonomy proposal. The Polisario should see the Moroccan proposal as a beginning rather than an end. Beissat indicated the Polisario would talk with Morocco about a solution only within the correct international legal framework. Even if that occurred, he believed that only a member of the Moroccan royal household could be a legitimate interlocutor.

12. (C) Summary (cont'd): Beissat complained that the government of Algeria did little to advance the Polisario's cause diplomatically beyond reciting standard talking points on the right to self-determination. He said his usual interlocutor on Polisario issues at the MFA was Minister Delegate Messahel, but he had occasional meetings with FM Bedjaoui. He also claimed he had good access to Algerian ministers and did not face the same constraints from MFA in arranging meetings as other ambassadors in Algiers. Beissat closed the discussion by noting that time for finding a solution on the Western Sahara was on the side of the Polisario because it was supported by international law and the United Nations. In his view, Morocco would respond to Sahrawi grievances only under pressure. While Morocco needed a speedy settlement for internal political reasons (growing Islamist pressure), Beissat maintained that the Polisario would rather wait -- or push -- for the right settlement of the Western Sahara dispute than accept autonomy. He did not completely rule out negotiations with the Moroccans, but made clear they would have to occur within a UN framework. END  
SUMMARY.

U.S. HAS TAKEN MOROCCO'S SIDE

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¶3. (C) Polisario Ambassador to Algeria (and Sahrawi MFA Secretary General-designate) Mohamed Beissat, in a discussion

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with DCM and PolEc Chief January 14, expressed sharp disappointment at the U.S. abstention on the recent UNGA Fourth Committee resolution on the Western Sahara. He said the change in the U.S. position on a resolution that was identical to what the U.S. had supported the previous year, combined with the NSC's September meeting with CORCAS, underscored a dramatic shift in U.S. policy in favor of Morocco. The U.S., he complained, had no reason to do the bidding of France; the Polisario and the Sahrawi people had done nothing to merit such treatment. DCM noted that the U.S. was not alone in abstaining on this year's resolution and that other European nations had also changed position and abstained. DCM rejected the notion that the U.S. was colluding with France, underscoring that the U.S. position on the Western Sahara had not fundamentally changed.

AUTONOMY CANNOT BE THE BASIS FOR DISCUSSION

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¶4. (C) Beissat clearly stated the Polisario's opposition to any discussions on the future status of the Western Sahara that started at a point other than Morocco's acceptance to hold a referendum, which Beissat maintained was agreed to as part of the Baker Plan. After listening patiently to Beissat's review of Polisario grievances with Morocco in past negotiations, DCM observed that Morocco ultimately refused to accept the Baker Plan -- which was why the U.S. was now pursuing an alternative approach. He told Beissat that the U.S. had stressed to Morocco the need to present a credible autonomy proposal as a basis for negotiation. DCM also pressed Beissat on the need for direct discussions between Morocco and the Polisario.

¶5. (C) Beissat said the Polisario could not accept using a Moroccan autonomy plan as the basis for discussions on the future of the Western Sahara. For one thing, accepting discussions on autonomy would signal Polisario abandonment of the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. For another, Morocco "has no right" to make a one-sided proposal.

The conflict is a UN issue, he said, and any discussions should occur within that framework. A referendum, he continued, was the only way for the Sahrawis to choose independence from Morocco, integration with it, or some form of autonomy. Starting discussions on an autonomy proposal -- an approach that Beissat insisted had no basis in international law -- was unacceptable.

ROYAL MOROCCAN HOUSEHOLD MUST BE ENGAGED

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¶6. (C) DCM and PolEc Chief noted that in the current post-Baker Plan environment, a Moroccan autonomy proposal was the only vehicle for discussions between the parties. The Polisario's discussion of it with the Moroccans would not signal Polisario acceptance of it. The Polisario could make counter proposals, we stressed. What was not in the Polisario interest, in the U.S. view, was to turn down the opportunity to talk. Beissat countered that the Polisario would be open to discussion of a proposal managed and tabled by the UN. Agreeing to discuss Morocco's plan, in contrast, would be tantamount to accepting King Mohammed VI as the Sahrawi sovereign and was not acceptable.

¶7. (C) Leaving aside the readiness and willingness of the Polisario to discuss a Moroccan autonomy proposal, PolEc Chief asked Beissat for his views on prospective Moroccan interlocutors. Beissat responded that Taieb Fassi Fihri was very hostile to the Polisario and made clear in stark terms that he lacked credibility with the Polisario. Beissat said a member of the royal family or a senior royal counselor would be the best interlocutor -- notwithstanding Polisario objection to discussion of an autonomy proposal -- if there

was to be any hope of a political settlement. Ultimately, concluded Beissat, the King would determine what was acceptable to Morocco. Beissat also offered that any discussions with Morocco, in his view, should take place under UN auspices in a third country that was trusted by both parties.

GOA DIPLOMACY LIMITED TO USUAL TALKING POINTS

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¶ 8. (C) On the relationship between the Polisario and Algeria, Beissat commented that during his recent tour of Latin America to seek diplomatic recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the Algerian government had provided no support. His hotel arrangements and meetings were coordinated mainly out of the Polisario's regional embassy in Havana. Beissat claimed that Algeria did not lift a finger to help the Polisario in pushing its diplomatic interests abroad. Quipping that an Algerian diplomat "doesn't say hello without instructions from Algiers," Beissat said even when the GOA could be helpful on issues like recognition it was not. He cited the example of South Africa, with which Algeria had good relations, as one country that the Algerians had not helped encourage to recognize the Polisario. Beissat described Algerian policy as being limited strictly to a set of talking points supporting the right of self-determination of the Sahrawi people and the need to resolve the dispute over the Western Sahara in the context of decolonization.

¶ 9. (C) Despite that, Beissat said he had excellent access to ministers in the Algerian government. While senior Polisario officials, like the "defense minister" would call Algerian officials directly, he said most communications with the government of Algeria went through him. (Comment: Unlike the rest of the diplomatic corps, Beissat appeared not to be stymied in his requests for meetings by Algerian MFA protocol. Beissat told us he generally submitted the required diplomatic note requests, especially when traveling outside of Algiers, but called ministers directly to fix a time for his meetings. Other ambassadors have been rapped on

the knuckles repeatedly for doing this. Beissat said that as the Sahrawi ambassador he has easy access. Beissat also mentioned that he met at MFA with FM Bedjaoui, but usually dealt with Minister Delegate Messahel on Polisario concerns. End Comment.)

TIME (AND VIOLENCE?) ON POLISARIO'S SIDE

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¶ 10. (C) Beissat made a point toward the end of our discussion of noting that, as regarded finding a solution on the Western Sahara, time was on the Polisario's side. The Sahrawis had UN support and international law on their side. At the same time, past experience had taught the Sahrawis that the Moroccan leadership ("makhzen") only responded to pressure, be it international or internal. The U.S. and other members of the international community should press the Moroccans to fulfill their obligations under UN resolutions and international law. If that did not occur, he said, the Polisario had made problems for Morocco in the past and could do so again, especially if Morocco was wedded to autonomy as the only solution. He blustered that the Polisario could strike the Moroccans again if it wanted to do so. Beissat claimed that the Moroccan leadership faced growing opposition from Islamists anyway, and needed a quick resolution of the Western Sahara conflict for internal political reasons. The Polisario, he said, would wait for the right solution rather than accept a bad one. DCM reiterated the importance of talking to the Moroccans directly and considering any autonomy proposal as a starting point rather than an end point.

¶ 11. (C) COMMENT: Beissat took a surprisingly hard line in his discussion with us. When not accompanied by other Polisario officials in the past, he has sometimes shown signs of flexibility. This was not one of those times. It was clear that he and the Polisario believe the U.S. has made a

deliberate decision at the highest level to take Morocco's side over the disputed Western Sahara. The Polisario appears to have hardened its attitudes on discussions as a result. While he hinted that the Polisario might begrudgingly agree to talk directly with Moroccan officials, he made clear that it would only occur in circumstances consonant with what he called "international legality." He once again ruled out a unilateral autonomy proposal as a satisfactory basis for discussions.

FORD